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U.S. Swaps 4 Spies for 25 Jailed in East Bloc

Polish Agent Who Got Hughes Radar Secrets Released; Bid to Free 2 Soviet Dissidents Fails

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WASHINGTON—The United States traded four East Bloc spies—including a Polish agent serving a life prison sentence in a spectacular Southern California espionage case—for 25 prisoners from East German and Polish jails Tuesday in one of the biggest prisoner exchanges since World War II.

Marian Zacharski, the Polish operative who four years ago paid \$110,000 to Hughes Aircraft engineer William Holden Bell for vital U.S. radar secrets, crossed the Glienicke Bridge from West to East Berlin along with two East Germans sentenced to jail for espionage and a Bulgarian awaiting trial for spying.

Crossing from east to west on the bridge, which was the scene of the 1962 exchange of Soviet master spy

Col. Rudolf Abel for American U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, were 23 prisoners released from East German and Polish jails. Two other released prisoners chose to remain in East Germany to complete personal business. Family members of the 23 freed prisoners accompanied them to the West.

A Justice Department official in Washington said that the United States had sought the release of Soviet dissidents Andrei D. Sakharov and Anatoly Shcharansky as part of the deal but that the Soviet Union refused. Sakharov, a noted nuclear physicist, has been living in internal exile in the Soviet city of Gorky. Shcharansky has been imprisoned since 1977 for his participation in the Jewish emigration movement.

"After it became clear that the Soviets would not change their position, we decided that obtaining the release of 25 persons and (their) family members was an important humanitarian step which justified the agreement," said the official, who asked not to be identified.

U.S. officials said the persons released by the Communist authorities were all Europeans but they refused to identify them further or to specify the crimes for which they were convicted. But United Press International reported from Berlin that most had been serving life sentences in East German prisons for working for U.S. intelligence. The news agency said 17 were East German citizens.

Richard R. Burt, assistant secretary of state for European affairs, went to West Berlin to supervise the transfer of prisoners.

A senior State Department official said in West Berlin that the United States is "highly satisfied" with the trade because of the 25-4 ratio. He insisted that the United States has not agreed to do anything more than release the four named spies and said the deal has nothing to do with the current Walker family spy case, in which U.S. Navy secrets are believed to have been stolen. A transcript of the press briefing by the official, who declined to be identified by name, was made public by the State Department in Washington.

East German Go-Between

The official said the swap was arranged with the help of Wolfgang Vogel, an East German lawyer who has frequently acted as go-between in East-West prisoner exchanges. The official said the Soviet Union was informed of the deal and may have played an

indirect role, although all U.S. contacts were with East Germany.

"The preparations for this exchange have been under way for some time," the official said. "In fact, some of the earlier contacts and discussions took place nearly three years ago."

That would put the start of negotiations just months after Zacharski was sentenced Dec. 14, 1981, to life in prison. It also means that the talks started before the other three spies involved in the exchange were even arrested, indicating that the Polish agent may have been the key element in the deal as far as the East Bloc was concerned.

The other three were Alfred Zehe, an East German who was serving an eight-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to espionage charges Feb. 21, 1985, in Boston; Alice Michelson, a 67-year-old East German grandmother

who was sentenced to 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to espionage charges last week in New York, and Penyu Baychev Kostadinov, a Bulgarian still awaiting trial for spying.

Zacharski, an intelligence undercover operative posing as a representative of a Polish machinery company, befriended Bell, a radar engineer at the Hughes Aircraft Co. plant in El Segundo who lived in the same Playa del Rey apartment complex. Bell pleaded guilty to espionage in 1981 and was sentenced to eight years in prison.

U.S. officials said Bell passed to Zacharski documents concerning the radar system for the B-1 and Stealth bombers; the look-down, shoot-down radar system on F-14 and F-15 fighters that the United States alone had at the time; the Phoenix air-to-air missile used by the F-14; an all-weather radar system for tanks, and an experimental radar system for the Navy. The officials said the information saved the Soviet Bloc years of work and hundreds of millions of dollars in matching U.S. weapons systems and devising defenses against them.

Bell, now 65, is serving his sentence at the federal prison on Terminal Island in San Pedro. His lawyer, Robert L. Kirste, said Tuesday that neither he nor his client were surprised by the swap and that Bell has no hard feelings towards Zacharski.

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"He (Bell) feels kindly towards him," said Kirste. "Zacharski was a trained professional, doing his job." Kirste said Bell was neither offered nor would have wanted to be traded to the Soviets, adding that his client testified against Zacharski at the trial in Los Angeles.

Zacharski, who was also held at Terminal Island, made news again in 1983 when a prison guard accused other guards of accepting money from the convicted spy in exchange for unlimited access to telephones and other favors.

President Reagan commuted Zacharski's sentence to time already served to clear the way for the exchange. Because of the seriousness of his crimes, presidential clemency was required. The other convicted spies were released by court action.